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ADDRESS

AT THE

FUNERAL OF EDWARD LASKER

BY

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It is now four years since I saw for the first time him to whom Americans to-day pay this last sad tribute. He stood in the Parliament of his country, nominally the representative of its metropolis, really the representative of a constituency far greater and wider than that; for wherever on German soil men struggled for reason against prejudice, for justice against force, for honesty against greed, for right against privilege, there were the devoted adherents, the true constituents, of Edward Lasker.

Soon afterward I came to know him personally, saw him in his own house and in mine, discussed with him political problems, both German and American; and my respect for him became deeper still. He was indeed a German to his heart's core; but he was more than that. He represented something broader than the German Empire,—something higher than its interests; his sympathies were as extended as mankind; his faith rose as high as human aspirations.

But let us look at his career more closely.

First, then, he represented the idea of *liberty*,

rational and constitutional. Not liberty which finds its joy in carnage, not liberty based upon the whims of a mob, not liberty which produces fine speeches and nothing more; but liberty rejoicing in industrious peace, based upon principles, secured by institutions, insisting not only upon rights but upon duties.

Next, he represented the idea of *progress*. Not a wild progress, secured by noise and chicanery; but a steady progress, secured by justice, order, thrift, thought.

He represented also the idea of *reform*. Not of reform by vague declamation, or by the trick of shielding partisan friends and exposing partisan enemies; but by thorough study of the defects of his own country and the excellencies of other countries, by fearless exposure of malefactors, whether high or low, whether of this party or of that, by an honest struggle against that greed for place or pelf which in this century is the main agent in debauching legislation.

And, finally, he represented the *elevation of man*. Not by going back to romantic ideals, not by making of existing society a heap of ruins, with schemers or dreamers "orating" from its summit, not by undermining the strength of the individual and adding to the strength of the state; but by steadily increasing the sum of truth and justice in laws, in institutions, and in the hearts of men.

Such was the man; and for such an apostolate he was well equipped. As a *writer* and *scholar* he took high rank in a land richly endowed with writers and scholars. As an essayist he took a wide range. The first of his essays in the volume most recently collected is upon the dealing with state problems and

world problems; following this are discussions philosophical and biological, and finally brief treatises upon the best methods of instruction. Broad as the field was, he brought to every part of it deep and conscientious thought.

As a *statesman* few equaled him in the work of carefully adjusting an ancient state to a new time. As a *debater*, among all that brilliant galaxy of German statesmen no one surpassed him in keenness and vigor.

There was little, indeed, in mere external circumstances to aid him in achieving this position. Among princes by birth he stood a plebeian. Among the princes of finance he stood a simple professional man who gave little thought to increasing his modest income. But he was their peer. Whatever of nobility a prince of the realm might feel due to his order, —whatever of honor a prince of finance might feel due to his profession—so much of nobility, so much of honor, Edward Lasker felt due to himself and to human nature. No sane man ever charged him with dishonor; none could imagine him anything but incorruptible.

He was, indeed, criticised by some as severe, minute, and unsparing. He was so. Every man has the faults of his qualities, and I should be disposed to place his in a want of a due proportion of serenity and optimism. Yet this defect was but the reverse of a character in which nature had stamped patriotic devotion as its obverse. It at least saved him from that loose optimism which is one of the worst evils of our republic—the feeling which tolerates present wrong in the careless assurance of the future preva-

lence of right. To say that he made mistakes at times is simply to say that he was human—but no mistake ever shook the profound faith of thinking men in his honesty and patriotism.

As to his general character, he seems to illustrate the argument of one of the most brilliant among modern moral philosophers against those who deny the possibility of moral progress. The argument is that morality has as its main factors will and knowledge,—that, if the will be kept at normal strength, the increase of knowledge must insure a higher range of morality,—and that the working out of this principle will be seen in the growth of men who unite to the strong will of the olden time the increased knowledge of the new time—men who thus rise above many temptations which conquered men in other ages. Lasker seems to prove the truth of this argument. Though pre-eminently a tribune of the people, he rose above the temptations which usually weaken a man in that position, for in his public utterances he rose above the temptation to demagoguism, and in his private utterances he rose above the temptation to cant. He was never diverted from his course by a desire to increase his fortune or his reputation. He had risen, indeed, above the fear of punishment and the hope of reward. Of such a man it may well be said, in the words of good George Herbert:

“His armor is his honest thought,
And simple truth his highest skill.”

His death honors him not less than his life. He was in his prime, but worn out with labors for his country. As Milton, in one of those sonnets which

touch the highest point ever reached by English poetry, declared sadly but proudly that his eyesight had been "lost in liberty's defence," so Lasker, as he found his strength failing, might have claimed as proudly that he had given health and life for the same noble cause.

His country has lost in him a devoted and honest servant. We in America have an especial loss. It is much to have lost at one of the centers of European thought, where our country is mainly misunderstood, a man who did not mistake the scum floating on the surface of society for the vigorous currents circulating through the depths below. His visit to our land had, indeed, as one of its objects, the renewal of old friendships and the satisfaction of love of kindred. But there was in it far more than this. He wished to continue his studies of this republic—of its methods, its men, its good and its evil. I have long believed that the man predestined to do on a greater scale the work of De Tocqueville, to write *the* book upon America, must be a German. Lasker had many of the gifts of this predestined man. The loss of his work is a great loss to us. The worst enemy of this republic is the man who praises everything; the next worst is the man who blames everything. Lasker would have committed neither of these faults. I was always struck, in his judgments of America, by his insight and his fairness. He was severe, but never cynical; he was hopeful, but never loosely optimistic.

My friends, as we stand by his coffin there must come upon all of us whose souls are not hopelessly closed a vivid sense of the brotherhood of man. Here lies one born far from us, separated from many

of us by abysses of race, language, creed, custom—yet one whom we are proud to call in the highest sense our brother. This brotherhood he recognized. No barriers of creed could shut out from him the view of it. Never was he more vigorous than when he stood up for the rights of Roman Catholics in Parliament; never more eloquent than when he stood by the grave of his Protestant friend Twesten. He came of that race which has upheld for thousands of years, against all temptations, all sophistry, all obloquy, all cruelty, the idea of the Divine unity. And he loved his race; but he rose superior to all the environments of race and creed. Like those men of different races and creeds, Baruch Spinoza and Hugo Grotius in the seventeenth century, like Moses Mendelssohn and Gotthold Lessing in the eighteenth century, so did Edward Lasker in the nineteenth century belong to the good and noble and true souls who have striven to make this earth better and more beautiful—who, whether Jew or Gentile, form the true elect of mankind, the very Israel of God.